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Executive Registry

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High-Level Bureaucrats Get Bargain Lunches

By Nancy L. Ross

Washington Post Staff Writer

Some federal officials are eating beyond Uncle Sam's means in their executive dining rooms, sometimes paying as little as \$1.51 for meals that cost \$16.06 to prepare, according to a report released yesterday.

These cost overruns in private governmental dining rooms were revealed in a survey by the General Accounting office that was commissioned and made public yesterday by Sen. Margaret Chase Smith.

This is the second time the senator from Maine, who regularly eats a homemade cream cheese and olive sandwich at her desk, has gone after government officials for eating high off the public hog.

Last November she caused the executive lunchrooms at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to be closed after GAO found that top NASA executives (earning \$24,000 a year and up) were paying only 45 cents for meals that actually cost \$4.03.

Lest visions of public officials downing duck à l'orange and French champagne dance in the taxpayer's head, it should quickly be noted the actual cost of the food—and sometimes the resulting menus—is not the main reason for the problem. What does run up the cost is labor—the salaries of employees paid to serve relatively few people in exclusive surroundings.

The latest GAO random

survey of departments and agencies singled out the Department of Transportation as housing a greater overrun than NASA. While the space-men's cost-price ratio was 9-1, the DOT ratio is 10-1. Executives pay an average of only \$1.51 per meal as compared to an average cost of \$16.06 per meal. The cost does not include the cost of space and utilities. But what Sen. Smith did not point out was the actual cost of the food is also \$1.51.

The Secretary, his aides (33 people) and guests are the people authorized to use the lunchroom. The Secretary and the aides each pay a \$50 membership fee and average costs. But, asks GAO, should the agency or department be required to assume the labor costs?

After the first GAO investigation, 60 NASA officials got together and decided to contribute \$25 a month each for their own food which they buy from commercial sources. Management was given over to a nonprofit civilian concession with the result that total costs were cut to \$1.97 per meal. The menu: soup, sandwich, salad, desert and nonalcoholic beverage.

Grits as well as beans and hot dogs are often served in the executive dining room of John Connally's Treasury Department. Yet the cost-price ratio is 6-1. The GAO says the 53 top-grade executives using the room pay \$2 apiece for luncheons that

are worth \$14.31 when labor is figured in. The dining room has a full-time cook, but its three waiters and a dishwasher double as messengers and custodians to save the government money.

Sen. Smith also claimed that two agencies get free liquor on occasion from stocks confiscated by the Bureau of Customs. A Treasury official told GAO less than two gallons of alcoholic beverages from confiscated stock were consumed during fiscal 1971.

Other culprits singled out by GAO were the Justice Department, where VIPs pay \$1.66 for a meal worth \$7.10, and Interstate Commerce Commission, where the figures are \$1.94 and \$3.53 respectively.

Only the Department of Agriculture merited Sen. Smith's compliments as "a paragon of virtue." The executive lunchroom there gets its food from the same cafeteria as other employees. The officials pay a service charge of 25 cents a meal for waitress service that actually costs 50 cents a meal.

And what about Sen. Smith's own colleagues who fancy more than a desktop sandwich? The Down East Republican replied she did not intend to exclude the U.S. Senate from scrutiny. "We should be just as accountable and I shall include the Senate in the amendment or amendments that I offer to the appropriations bills."

FROM: THE EVENING STAR - 9 DECEMBER 1971

Bargain Lunches and Free Booze For U.S. Executives Draw Fire

Associated Press

In the executive lunchrooms of government, meals come at bargain prices and, in some of them, the bosses get free cocktails.

The General Accounting Office reported the cut-rate luncheon tabs and said free liquor, from stocks confiscated by the Customs Bureau, is served on special occasions at the Treasury and the National Science Foundation.

Sen. Margaret Chase Smith, R-Maine, made public the findings yesterday, and said she will sponsor legislation re-

quiring all federal agencies to submit to Congress annual accountings of their executive-lunchroom operations.

She said a private dining room for senators would be covered, too.

Six Agencies Checked

The GAO report covered luncheon prices in executive lunchrooms at six federal agencies, and found that in five of them, the average charge was far below the average cost to the government.

The Department of Transportation topped the list. The

average executive lunchroom check there was reported at \$1.51, with the average cost of a meal figured at \$16.06.

Personnel and service account for the major share of the cost reported by the GAO. Its report did not discuss the menus in executive lunchrooms.

At the Treasury Department, the GAO said, the average charge was \$2.45 for executive lunchroom meals that cost an average of \$14.31.

Liquor Available

"In addition to this, they get free liquor on special occasions, and these alcoholic beverages are obtained from confiscated stock," the senator said.

The National Science Foundation also was reported receiving confiscated liquor from the Bureau of Customs to be served in the executive lunchroom on special occasions.

At the Justice Department, the average price of an executive-lunchroom meal was reported at \$1.66, the cost, \$7.10.

At the Interstate Commerce Commission, the luncheon checks averaged \$1.94 for meals costing an average of \$3.53.

"It is interesting to note that one of the 12 ICC commissioners refuses to participate in the executive lunchroom arrangement," Mrs. Smith said.

She said the Agriculture Department "is a paragon of virtue," with its executive lunchroom getting food from the cafeteria used by other employees.

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